



Senate Approves Defense Appropriations Bill with
\$500 Million in Emergency Firefighting Funds
July 22, 2004

Washington, DC – The Senate today approved \$500 million in emergency funding to assist federal firefighters in responding to this summer's severe fire threat in national forests in California and throughout the West.

The funding was added to the \$417 billion Department of Defense Appropriations bill by the House-Senate Conference Committee on which Senator Dianne Feinstein (*D-Calif.*) served and Representative Jerry Lewis (*R-Calif.*) chaired.

“This \$500 million will provide firefighters with the tools they need to effectively combat wildfires,” Senator Feinstein said. **“We need to get this funding to those who need it most – the communities that face a significant threat this fire season.”**

In the past week, nearly 50,000 acres of forests have burned in Southern California. This comes after a last fall's devastating fire season that burned more than 750,000 acres of California forest, destroyed 3,650 homes and killed 24 people. The fall 2003 fires are ultimately expected to result in \$3 billion in insurance payouts and hundreds of millions of dollars in public expenditures.

Heavy fire seasons in recent years have forced the U.S. Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management to borrow funds from non-firefighting accounts to pay for fire suppression. This has prevented the agencies from performing their other functions including land management and hazardous fuels reduction leaving many national forests at serious risk of fire. Southern California forests are at particular risk of fire due to drought and the effect of the pine bark beetle which have left an estimated 12 million trees dead.

Last year, Senator Feinstein and Representative Lewis secured \$150 million to create a comprehensive tree removal program for the Emergency Watershed Protection program of the Natural Resources Conservation Service. An additional \$50 million was secured for the U.S. Forest Service tree removal programs on federal land and private property authorized by landowners.

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